

A third concern is that higher taxes would lead to massive increases in smuggling, thereby keeping smoking high but reducing government revenues. Smuggling is a serious problem. Estimates suggest that 6-8% of all cigarettes consumed globally are smuggled, mostly in the form of non-taxed cigarettes exported free of tax and smuggled back into a country. Large tax differentials between countries provide an obvious motive for smuggling. However, corruption within countries is a stronger predictor of smuggling than price. An econometric model that accounts for potential bootlegging (the legal purchase of cigarettes in one country for consumption or resale in another country without paying applicable taxes or duties) in response to tax increases in 23 European countries in 1995 finds that a unilateral tax increase of 10% by one country would lead to an average increase of 7% in revenue. Coordinated tax increases among neighbouring legislatures would increase tax revenues by 8%.²⁶

It is important to note the experience of Canada,²⁷ which reduced its tax rates as an attempt to counter smuggling. The result was that consumption rose, especially among youths, and revenues fell. Thus, rather than forgoing the health benefits of reduced smoking, and increased revenue, the appropriate response for governments is to crack down on smuggling. Smuggling control is a top priority of the World Health Organization's framework convention on tobacco control.

Conclusion

The threat posed by smoking to global health is unprecedented, but so is the potential for preventing millions of smoking related deaths with highly effective policies. A comprehensive tobacco control policy is not likely to harm economies.

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Everest and the therapeutic cigarette

Recently I had the opportunity to read the official account of the 1922 Everest expedition, written mainly by its leader, Brigadier the Honorable C G Bruce. Of special medical interest, however, is a chapter on respiratory problems by Captain G I Finch, a strong and, at the time, rather unpopular advocate of auxilliary oxygen, but, after Mallory, probably the finest mountaineer in the party. It reads:

"Cigarette smoking proved of great value at high altitudes. At first we noticed that unless one kept one's mind on the question of breathing—that is, made breathing a voluntary process instead of the involuntary process it normally is—one suffered from a lack of air and a consequent feeling of suffocation... A voluntary process must be substituted, and this throws a

considerable strain on the mind and renders sleep impossible. On smoking cigarettes, we discovered that after the first few inhalations it was no longer necessary to concentrate on breathing, the process becoming once more an involuntary one. Evidently some constituent of the cigarette smoke takes the place and performs the stimulation function of the carbon dioxide normally present. The effect of a cigarette lasted for about three hours."

It is also of interest that listed among the stores of the successful first ascent of Kangchenjunga in 1955 were 25 000 cigarettes and 16 lb of tobacco, and I bet they finished the lot.

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